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The Fremantle Worker's Social & Leisure Club 1914-2014

By Deborah Gare & Jane Davis

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The Fremantle Workers' Social and Leisure Club, 1914 – 2014

The Fremantle Workers' Social and Leisure Club

9 Henry Street

Fremantle WA 6160

Australia

www.freoworkers.net

Text by Deborah Gare and Jane Davis

Design by Bob Sommerville

Editorial advisors: Don Whittington, Ruth Belben and Ellis Griffiths

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President's Foreword

In 2014 the Fremantle Workers' Social and Leisure Club has experienced several significant events. First, the club has celebrated its first century of existence, a momentous feat in anyone's estimation, but particularly so in this case given the serious challenges to the Club's future that have been confronted in recent years.

Secondly, the club has made perhaps its most significant changes to its property and mission since we were first established. It is no secret that the club has experienced deep financial difficulties the past decade. In 2011, for a period of time, our club house closed its doors indefinitely. This was a tragic outcome for the members who find a home and sometimes family in our club. I am deeply proud of the recovery we have since achieved. Not only were the doors soon reopened, but our membership numbers have grown steadily ever since.

Nonetheless, Fremantle has changed significantly in the past thirty years and our club can no longer trade profitably from its current club house. By the end of 2014, our centenary year, we will have therefore left Henry Street and joined the South Fremantle Football Club at Fremantle Oval. This is a profound change, but one which we hope will ensure the future survival of that which matters to us most: our community.

Thirdly, the club is drafting ambitious new plans to ensure its future survival. It is now negotiating with the City of Fremantle and the Department of Sport and Recreation for the development of shared club space in a purpose-built facility at Fremantle Park. Innovation like this provides us with the greatest chance of a prosperous future.

If it wasn't the centenary year, such major institutional shifts alone would have been just cause to reflect upon the association's rich history. Yet the hundred year mark offers the opportunity to celebrate as well as to reflect on the past.

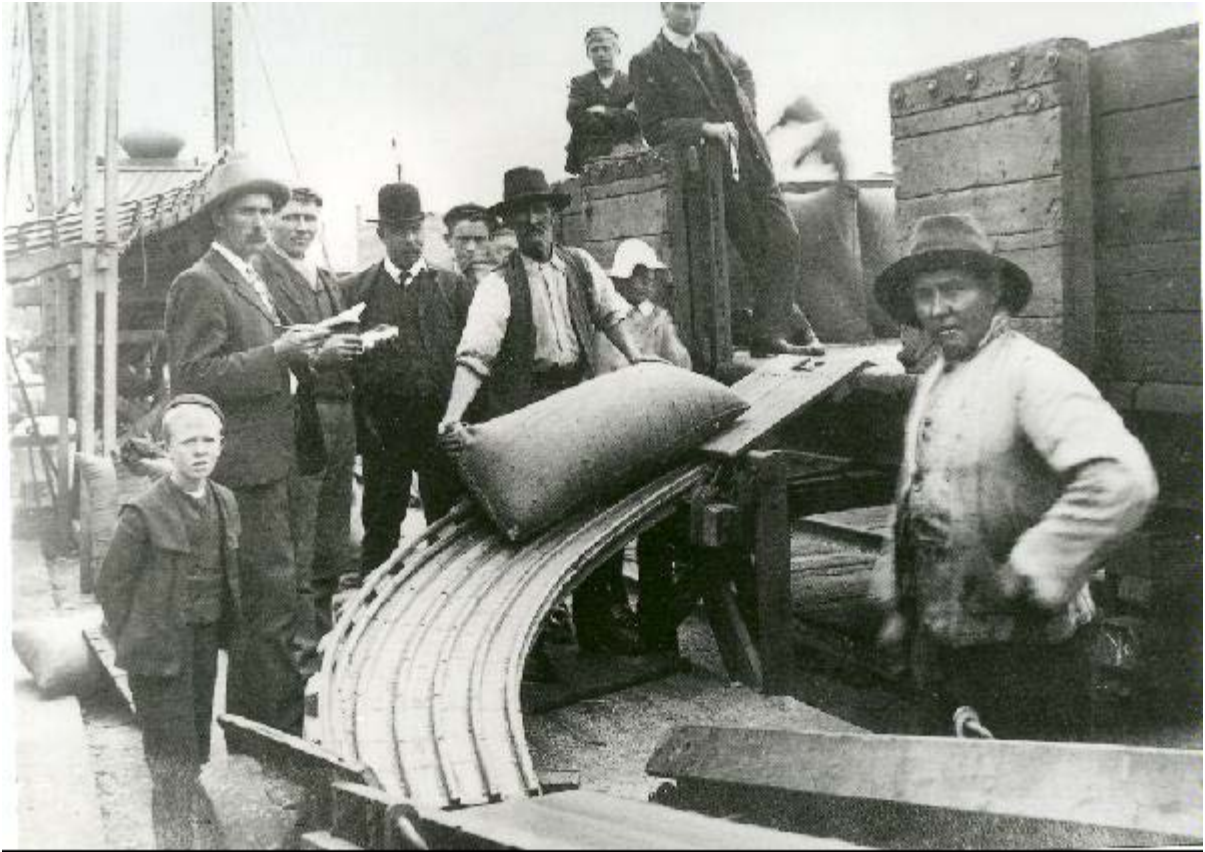
The Fremantle Workers' Club has been an invaluable element within Fremantle's historic west end. Our origins are as a 'democrats' club'—a place at which working people could meet, exchange ideas, debate politics and working conditions, and retreat momentarily from labouring life. The Workers' Club became part of family culture in Fremantle, not just working culture. Members like Des O'Brien joined because they were continuing a family tradition of association with the club and its community.

It was here that members of the past century talked about things that mattered in their town and in their workplace. They gathered when the great waterfront disputes reached a violent climax in the early twentieth century; they mourned the death of Tom Edwards, killed in a violent industrial dispute at the port in 1919; they rallied around each other in times of personal crisis; they shared a beer with the colourful newspaper editor, Billy Clare in the 1930s; they debated the rise of communism in Fremantle, and contested the membership of Paddy Troy at the height of the Cold War. Even now they gather to talk about things that matter. It is here that members of the Maritime Union of Australia, for example, regularly assemble to consider workplace issues on the Western Australian waterfront.

The club is no stranger to change. People have come and gone, traditions have evolved, and values have shifted in the past century. Perhaps the biggest change until now was the admission of women to the club: ladies gradually won rights of entry and then membership from the 1950s to the 1980s. From that example we can see how change can be a positive experience, and that it can bring renewal and diversity.

I am not only proud of what we have achieved in our first century, I am excited and optimistic at what we will achieve in our second. We owe it all, of course, to our members—past and present—and I thank them all.

Don Whittington, August 2014.



↑ Lumpers in Fremantle at work on the wharf, c.1914. ANU 1885/48163.

For the Advancement of Democracy Origins, 1914

'...the town itself was no less colourful than its waterfront...seafarers and globe trotters that the ships of half a century had left behind'.¹

In 1914, the year that the Fremantle Workers' Social and Leisure Club was founded, Fremantle was a busy working class town whose industry revolved around industry at the port. Many of Fremantle's maritime workers were members of the Lumpers' Union, the first union of unskilled workers in Western Australia.²

The inauguration of the club coincided with the outbreak of the First World War. Fremantle bustled with activity in the years between 1914 and 1918, as soldiers of the Australian Imperial Force embarked from the port on troopships bound for the battlegrounds of Europe and the Middle East.

FOR DEMOCRATS PROPOSED CLUB AT FREMANTLE

Mr. Herbert H. Taylor, whose one hobby is organising, is endeavoring to establish a Democratic Club at Fremantle.

He said as much to a "Daily News" representative this morning. "It has been recognised for some time," said he, "that a club of this description is wanted at Fremantle. It is necessary for the workers and democrats to foregather at some place where they can exchange views, and discuss matters of importance to themselves. That is why the club has been thought of. We propose to rent premises for the present, and apply for a licence. It might be asked, 'Why sell liquor?' Well, I can only reply by saying that the cost of such a club would be so great that some revenue must be returned. The club will be semi-political, but the main objects of the formation are to promote social intercourse among the democrats of the district, and to provide suitable democratic and current literature for the members. We hope in time to have our own premises. A meeting of persons desirous of forming the above club will be held at 8 p.m. on Monday next at No. 1 room of the Fremantle Trades Hall. Mr. W. Roche will preside."

← *Daily News*,
30 January 1914, p.4.

Fremantle's homefront was bitterly divided during the war over issues of patriotism, dissent and labour activism. Trade unions across Australia lobbied for fair work practices, arguing that these had to be preserved even during times of war. In Fremantle, port workers became suspicious that Australian grain exports would find their way to German markets, sparking a ferocious industrial dispute on the waterfront.³

This, then, was the social and historical background from which the Fremantle Workers' Social and Leisure Club emerged.

The 'Democrats Club'

'Fremantle is at last to have a club where all democrats can meet and discuss matters of mutual

interest', it was declared after the inaugural meeting of the club was convened at the Fremantle Trades Hall in February 1914. Members of its first organising committee were all prominent union leaders. William Roche, the president of the Fremantle Trades Hall Association, was appointed as the club's first president; Frank Rowe, secretary of the Lumpers' Union, was appointed as treasurer; and Herbert H. Taylor, secretary of the licensed victuallers' association, was made club secretary.⁴

Clubs for working men were, by this time, already popular in Britain. It was hoped that Fremantle's Workers' Club would provide a social refuge for the town's workers. Just as importantly, its founders intended that the club would increase political activism and provide learning opportunities for its members in an age when formal education was expensive and rare.⁵ In 1914 its secretary was empowered to purchase a library of



Register No. 52

Mr. D. Odgers

QUARTERS END:

Oct. 31

Jan. 31

April 30

July 31

This Ticket must be shown
on application.

NOT TRANSFERABLE.

Subscriptions:

PAID TO	Sec. Initials.
<u>Oct. 31. 14</u>	<u>H.H.T.</u>
<u>Jan 31. 15</u>	<u>H.H.T.</u>
<u>Apr. 30. 15</u>	<u>H.H.T.</u>
<u>July 31. 15</u>	<u>H.H.T.</u>

←↑ David Odgers was a waterside worker from North Fremantle. He was among the first members of the Fremantle Workers' Club in 1914. Odgers' membership card of 1914 - 1915, pictured here, shows that his quarterly subscription was paid and approved by the club secretary H.H. Taylor. S. Odgers, Rockingham.

'democratic literature' to the value of 10 shillings. The mission continued in years to come: by 1932 the club's library housed more than 3000 books.⁶

Though the association was clearly intended to be a gendered space—a preserve for working *men*—women weren't entirely left out of its mission statement. 'The ladies will also be catered for' it was declared, 'as periodical ladies nights are to be held'.⁷ In fact, the working women of Fremantle were already politically active and may have had no need for such a club. For it was here that the state's first Labour Womens' Organisation had been established a decade earlier which, in time, became the Fremantle women's branch of the Australian Labor Party (ALP).⁸



← The club house of the Fremantle Workers' Club, the historic three-storey building formerly known as the Lodges Hotel, in Henry Street.

Henry Street

1914 – 1919

The first clubhouse of the Fremantle Worker's club was a historic building in Henry Street sometimes known as Lodges Hotel. Constructed in the 1860s, the landmark property was thought to be the first three-storey building constructed in Western Australia.⁹ It had served in the nineteenth century as a school for ladies, the premises of the merchants Sandover and Mayhew, and as a private hotel. In 1887 it was transformed by the Fremantle Club into the most exclusive gentleman's club in the state,

‘a sort of holy of holies with Chinese waiters and closely-guarded portals’. There gentlemen concluded business agreements in the comfort of a social environment. Here, it was noted, ‘no stranger might set his profaning foot’ as the ‘privilege of membership was restricted to a select few’.¹⁰

Fremantle changed, however, after the discovery of gold in Western Australia in 1890. Migrants, trade and gold were funnelled through the port in the coming decade. The affluent merchant class which had once housed both its businesses and homes in Fremantle’s west end moved their families to gracious properties like Woodside and Ivanhoe on the outskirts of town.¹¹ In their place, Fremantle became home to working families and the businesses that served them.

The elite Fremantle Club died, there being insufficient demand for an exclusive gentlemen’s club in the west end. Its property in Henry Street was purchased by the AMP society and, in 1914, sold to the Fremantle Workers’ Club for £2000.¹²

Licensing Wars

Though the club’s main object was to promote ‘social intercourse among the democrats of the district’, its founders hoped the sale of alcohol would help fund the club’s activities.¹³ They struggled, however, to gain a license to do so. Authorities concluded that the club’s new premises were unsanitary and that its governing rules did not fulfil the requirements of the state’s liquor licensing laws. Twenty residents

FREMANTLE WORKERS' CLUB

Application for Registration

OPPOSED BY LICENSED VICTUALLERS.

INTERESTING PROCEEDINGS.

The adjourned hearing of an application by H. H. Taylor (secretary of the Fremantle Workers' Social and Leisure Club) for registration of premises in Henry-street, proposed to be used for purposes of a Workers' Club, was conducted before Mr. E. P. Dowley, R.M., and Messrs. F. Nicholas and Purdie, J'sP., sitting as a Licensing Bench, at Fremantle this morning.

Mr. Lavan said that before that objection was dealt with, he desired to bring under the notice of the bench a copy of a circular calling a meeting of the club. He considered it a gross attempt to intimidate his clients who were licensed victuallers of Fremantle.

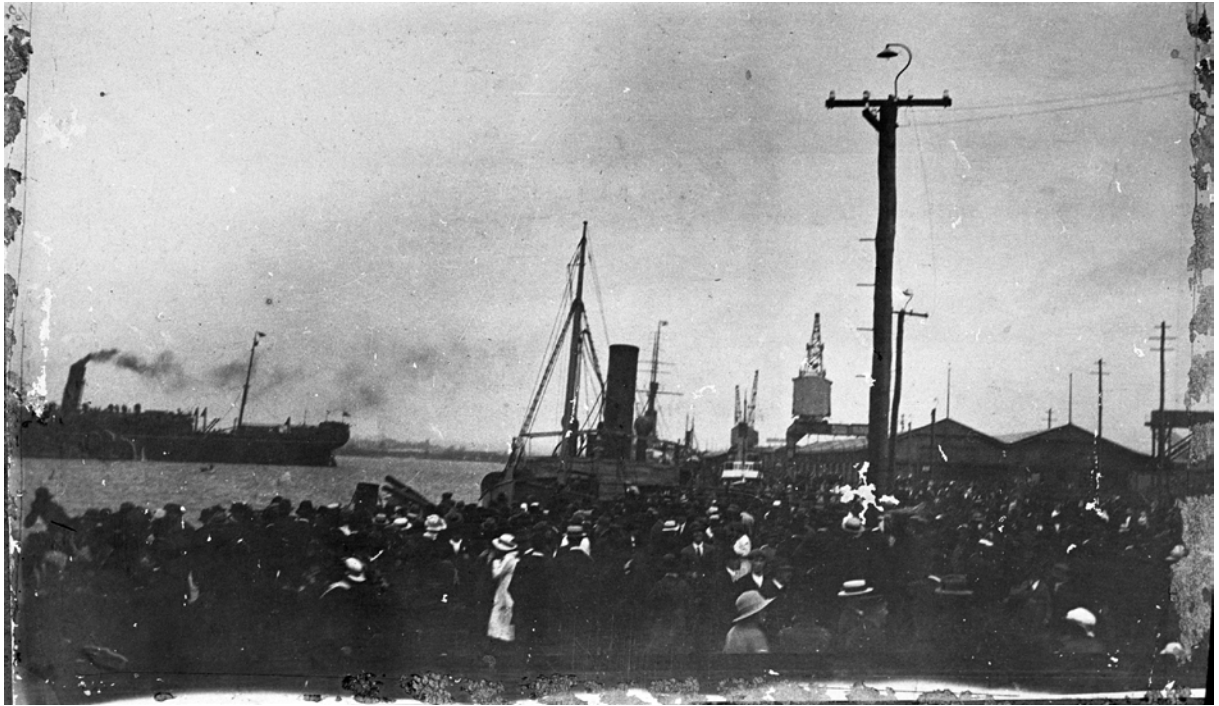
Mr. Unmack said that his clients had every right to issue the circular. Various objections had been lodged on behalf of these Fremantle residents who were, as was well known, licensed victuallers. There could only be one motive to these objections, and that was a mercenary one. The premises proposed to be used had previously been licensed as the Fremantle Club, and no objection had been raised then, although now it was maintained that they were not suitable.

→ *Daily News*,
23 March 1914, p.8.

objected to the club's application for a license, though Herbert Taylor complained bitterly that all were made by publicans or restaurateurs. The *Westralian Worker* added its perspective, claiming that the success of the victuallers' lobby in denying the Workers' Club a license was a reversal of the very democracy the club hoped to breed. By June, however, the club had gained nearly 200 members and its license to serve alcohol, having earned the support of the Fremantle police, was approved.¹⁴

On 2 September 1914, with fanfare, speeches and entertainment, the Fremantle Workers' Club opened its clubhouse. It was a great moment for the working people of the town declared the federal member of parliament for Fremantle, R.J. Burchell. Every port in Australia had a working men's club, he said, it was timely that the town established theirs.¹⁵

The opening of the club coincided almost to the day with the outbreak of war in Europe. As the world watched events unfold between Britain and Germany, Australians were momentarily distracted by a federal election. It followed a double dissolution of parliament called by the prime minister, Joseph Cook, after he failed to have legislation passed to prohibit the government from giving preference to union members in employment. Labour activists in Fremantle, now comfortably ensconced in their new club house, lobbied to return Burchell to parliament. The political engagement of the club was therefore apparent from the outset and, as soon became apparent, was to endure through its first century.



Alcohol and Activism 1919 – 1922

↑ Violence erupted at the Fremantle waterside in 1919 as industrial unrest escalated. Clashes with police on 'bloody Sunday', pictured here, left Tom Edwards dead.

The industrial unrest in Fremantle which had started in the war years reached a violent climax in 1919. At this time the world was gripped by an influenza pandemic that, by its end, is thought to have killed at least 50 million people.¹⁶ Strict quarantine measures were emplaced in Fremantle, affecting all passengers arriving from Europe or the eastern states. This, in turn, led to food shortages in Western Australia.

When the *Dimboola* arrived in port in 1919 it brought both food and passengers—the desired *and* undesirable. Members of the Lumpers' Union refused to unload its cargo until its passengers, some of whom were displaying symptoms of the flu, had endured their required period of quarantine. The premier, Hal Colebatch, ordered un-unionised government labourers to the port. As tensions flared across the town, violence erupted at the port. Dozens of workers and police were injured in a horrific riot in May. Tom Edwards, a lumper, was bludgeoned in the chaos and later died from his injuries.¹⁷

→ A flower-strewn
hearse carried Tom
Edwards to his
grave where record
crowds gathered to
hear him declared to
be a 'working class
martyr'.
JCPML 830/175/45.



Events at the wharf were fiercely debated in the Fremantle Workers' Club, many of its members and executive also being members of the Lumpers' Union. Edwards was declared a 'working class martyr' and the club was represented formally at his funeral. Thomas Walker, Fremantle's member of state parliament, addressed the deep crowd which gathered at Edwards' graveside. Edwards was not just a good family man, Walker proclaimed, but a 'good citizen':

His large heart beat with sympathy for the homes of those that were breadless, with a great desire for the betterment of those who had suffered so long in apparent hopeless despair. We part with him, but not with his spirit.¹⁸

Issues such as these fuelled the activism of Fremantle Workers' Club members and infused the spaces of its home in Henry Street. The waterfront dispute directly affected many of its members who were themselves wharfies, while the showdown between unions and cold-hearted government touched the nerve of the club's political agenda.

Drunkenness and the Royal Commission

Regardless of such political distractions, or perhaps because of them, the club's committee spent much of its formative years battling the behaviour of its members, defending its opening hours and debating the price of beer. By 1921 the club had 340 members on its books. The combination of cheap beer and political passion provoked

many a heated argument, and individual members were often suspended for 'unseemly behaviour' and 'conduct prejudicial to the best interests and general morale of the club'. Complaints of heavy drinking and foul language increased.¹⁹ Soon the sincerity of the club's moral objectives were questioned by observers as the community watched, aghast, at the drunken behaviour which often spilled from the club house.

The matter of alcohol consumption and licensing controls were then significant social issues in Australia. By the end of 1916 the temperance movement had successfully lobbied in most states for hotels to close daily by 6pm and to remain closed on Sundays. In Western Australia, pubs were permitted to remain open until 9pm but remained shut on Sundays.²⁰

There were then were sixty private clubs licensed in Western Australia, none of which were bound by restrictions on opening hours. Many were respectable providers of meals and accommodation, while others had become notorious as liquor dens.²¹ The Fremantle Workers' Club faced increasing community scrutiny and astonishing claims were published regarding members' alcohol consumption. 'The trading figures of the Fremantle Working Men's club are staggering', quipped the *Mirror* in 1921. An average of £35 of wholesale alcohol was purchased for each member, each year, it revealed. Sales in the club were equal to 23 litres of alcohol per week, per member, costing a consumer up to the equivalent of 30 per cent of the average working wage. 'There is no thirst at the port, thank you', noted the *Mirror*.²²

LIQUOR LICENSING

ROYAL COMMISSION'S FINAL SITTING.

The final public sitting of the Royal Commission on Licensing was conducted at Parliament House yesterday afternoon. There were present Messrs. Mann (chairman), M'Callum, O'Loughlen, and Richardson, M.L.A.

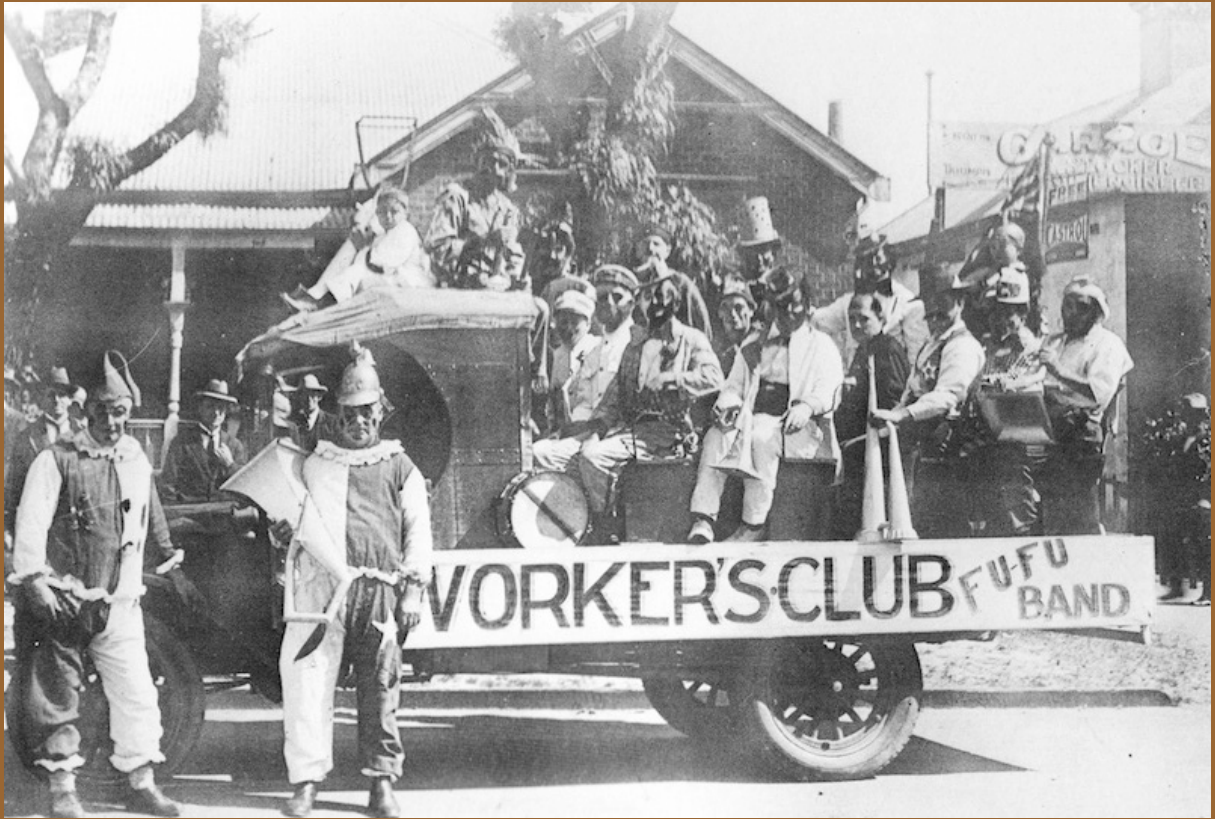
WORKERS' CLUB AFFAIRS.

"What is done with the profits of your club?" was an inquiry the chairman put to Mr. Wm. Roche, secretary of the Workers' Club, Fremantle. "We haven't got any," was the quick reply. "Any surplus money is used upon improving and keeping the building and equipment in order." Mr. Mann then wanted to know the liquor consumption per head. "This statement (produced) says £35 odd," said the chairman. "Rather high, isn't it?" Mr. Roche was ready to defend the club members. "The average worker is a pretty heavy drinker," he parried. Then the witness explained that the £35 was estimated strictly on financial membership at the time. If an estimate were made on the usual membership the figure would be substantially reduced, and an additional factor was the large amount of tobacco, which was included in the bar trade tally. Mr. Roche said that, owing to the conditions of employment peculiar to Fremantle, it would not be fair to compel the club to close the bar to members before midnight. The strangers' room was consistently closed at 9 o'clock. It was not true that the club was unduly liberal with honorary members' tickets among the passengers and crews of visiting vessels.

† *Daily News*, 17 June 1922, p.2.

Alcohol consumption at the club was not, in reality, as high as such data suggests. Visitors to the club were not included in the way that sales data was calculated per member, and therefore the rate of consumption was certainly less than implied. Nonetheless, even if such numbers were generously inflated, reports point to a heavy drinking culture at the club in the 1920s which significantly exceeded the 1.2 litres of alcohol then consumed on average by Western Australians each week. Authorities noted that the consumption at the club was at least seven times greater, per member, than that of Perth's elite Weld Club.²³ William Roche was unapologetic. 'The average worker is a pretty heavy drinker', he shrugged.²⁴

With such claims as these being aired, it is no coincidence that a Royal Commission into Licensing was convened in 1922. Steeling themselves for the interrogation it would bring, the club resolved to open from 6.30am to midnight, daily, and to preserve their reduced price of beer.²⁵ Both factors, after all, ensured that a healthy number of members were enrolled. The Royal Commission didn't approve, though appears to have been too frightened to propose strict sanctions against the Fremantle Workers' and other clubs. Its final report recommended, instead, that the sale of alcohol in clubs be prohibited after 11pm.²⁶



↑ The Fufu Band, pictured here in the 1930s, performed in street parades and carnivals all across the Perth region, often raising money for charities which supported unemployed workers. Courtesy Betty Anderson.

The Fufu Band

The pride of the club in the inter-war years was its 'Fufu Band', an enthusiastic and colourful collection of musicians who provided entertainment in the club house and at community events. The Fufu Band was first formed in 1917, but was most active in the years of the Great Depression. It quickly gained a reputation for quirkiness, calling itself both 'comic' and 'irresponsible'.²⁷ Band members were dressed in outrageous costumes such as cowboys and Indians, while instruments were often homemade. The band typically performed from the back of an old truck around the streets of Fremantle and at charity events.

The band's performances were crazy and humorous. Campbell Jenkins later recalled that 'Hambone' Burridge, a popular performer, was once seen to conduct the band with a tomahawk.²⁸

David Clark, another band leader, was occasionally provided with time off work to perform with the Fufu Band. He would collect the piano from His Majesty's Hotel on Phillimore Street and hoist it to the back of the truck. It was 'absolutely wonderful!', he later declared.²⁹

Many of the Fufu Band's performances were in support of community associations, particularly those which struggled with the grim economic conditions of the Depression. In 1930, for example, the band helped raise money for the Leederville Unemployment Relief Fund at a local carnival, where they were awarded the 'most original tableau' prize. In 1932 they performed alongside acrobats and tumblers at the North Cottesloe surf carnival and at a concert to raise Christmas funds for the unemployed families of Buckland Hill.³⁰



↑ Izzy Orloff, 'Fremantle Lumpers at the Port', 1924. SLWA 12287D.

Scandal and Survival 1922 – 1938

'What is done with the profits of your club?', demanded the chairman of the Royal Commission on Licensing. 'We haven't got any', replied William Roche, who was by then the club's secretary.³¹

Roche, the club's inaugural president, was a prominent labour activist in Fremantle. He had previously been president of the state's early Trades and Labour Council, the Trades Hall Association in Fremantle and the Eight Hours Committee; chairman of the Buckland Hill Roads Board; and ALP candidate. He was by all accounts well liked and highly respected.

Yet Roche soon immersed the Fremantle Workers' Club in scandal. The club had no profits to speak of, he declared to the Royal Commission, because all moneys raised were returned to the club for its maintenance and operation. The lack of funds may also

have been because Roche systematically stole large amounts of cash from the club between 1922 and 1923.

The alarm was first raised in September 1923 when Roche was reported missing by his friends. Weeks later he was discovered, weak and emaciated, at a camp in Southern Cross. Dragged back to Perth he appeared before the Fremantle Police Court where he was described by journalists as being 'elderly and bearing the appearance of a man completely broken in spirit'. Police alleged that he had stolen around £85 from the Workers' Club over the course of several months.³²

The members, however, rallied to Roche in the face of his obvious distress. The club's new president, William Moore, advised the court that restitution for the lost money had been made and that members unanimously desired the charges against the disgraced secretary to be withdrawn. Fremantle detectives protested bitterly, but Roche walked from court lucky to have been freed from serious charges.³³

THE ROCHE CASE. Charges Withdrawn. By Fremantle Workers' Club.

William Roche (60), previously secretary of the Fremantle Workers' Social and Leisure Club, appeared at the Fremantle Police Court yesterday morning to answer six charges of stealing. The charges were that on December 23, 1922, at Fremantle, being the servant, or clerk, of the club, he stole the sum of £6 18s., the property of the club; that on July 14, 1923, he stole the sum of £28 16s.; that, on the same date, he stole the further sum of £5; that, on June 23, 1923, he stole the sum of £20 19s.; that on June 30, 1923, he stole the sum of £25 2s.; and that, on July 7, 1923, he stole the sum of £26 17s.

After the charges had been read out to the accused, the president of the Fremantle Workers' Social and Leisure Club (Mr. Moore) informed the Bench, which consisted of Messrs. H. Parker and W. J. Sumpton, J's.P., that restitution of the stolen money had been made, and that, at a meeting of the members of the club held on Sunday last, it had been unanimously decided that the charges against Roche should be withdrawn. He made application for the withdrawal.

Detective-Sergeant Dungey, prosecuting, entered a formal protest against the withdrawal of the charges. He said that the department viewed with disfavour actions of this kind, as restitution of stolen money, though in this case satisfactory to those who had laid the complaint was not always conducive to the ends of justice.

Commenting that Roche was a very fortunate man, the Bench permitted the charges to be withdrawn. The accused, who appeared to have been much affected by the proceedings, completely broke down when this announcement was made, and, sobbing convulsively, was assisted from the dock by the Court orderly.

↑ *The West Australian*,
10 October 1923, p.7.

Despite the scandal of theft and the threat of a Royal Commission, the Fremantle Workers' Club generally flourished in the 1920s. It was, in fact, a period of expansion and renovation.

The club became a popular social venue to drink, dance, enjoy music and read. By 1925 it boasted a library of more than 6000 books which, it claimed, was 'one of the finest of its kind in Australia'. Other forms of entertainment were provided to members, including the 'provision of card, dining, sitting and concert rooms'. Orchestras occasionally performed within the club house. Women were still not permitted membership of the club, though they and other visitors were occasionally invited to the club's social events. By the end of the decade the club had over 400 members.³⁴



← Commemorative certificate to celebrate the completed renovations of the Fremantle Workers' Club, 13 April 1932.

The Great Depression

After a catastrophic fall in world markets in 1929, however, the Fremantle community faced the bleak economic environment of the Great Depression. It was not nearly as easy for the club to survive in such an economic climate. In 1930 William Moore noted in his half-yearly report to members that:

I regret that it is not as cheerful as has been the case in past years, due to quite a number of factors, of which the most alarming is the falling off in turnover due to the strenuous times through which we are all passing.³⁵

To make matters more difficult, membership numbers had grown so significantly in the preceding decade that major renovations to the Henry Street club house were required. Despite the financial challenges of the age, the club excitedly opened its renovated facilities in April 1932. These included a larger billiard room and renovated visitors' rooms, a reading room and a club lounge.³⁶

Parliamentarians and dignitaries gathered with members to celebrate the ongoing success of the club when it reopened. The Labor member for South Fremantle, Alexander McCallum, declared that 'a workers' club catered for the social and, to a certain degree, the intellectual side of a workman's life'. Toasts were raised, speeches were exchanged and Moore declared his intention to foster the club's ongoing growth.³⁷

The political agenda of the club was not dented by the Depression. Rather, its members were increasingly activist in the aid of workers and the most vulnerable people of the community. The 'Fufu Band' was enthusiastically established, a collection of rag-tag musicians from the club playing homemade instruments. They performed regularly at charity events, particularly those which supported unemployed workers. Visits were made to Perth's Old Men's Home where tobacco and pipes were distributed to impoverished, retired Lumpers, while donations were made to such charities as community picnics and the Swan Boys Orphanage.³⁸



↑ *Sunday Times*,
6 November 1932, p.3s.

The Scandalous Secretary

Despite the collegiality and philanthropy of members, scandal continued to hound the club. In November 1932, just months after the renovated club house was opened, members were shocked by a brazen robbery. Its secretary, Alfred Gregg, was attacked on his way home from the club one evening. Having been struck on the head and his keys to the club safe stolen, Gregg was left unconscious for hours before he was found wandering insensible along South Terrace.³⁹

When police rushed to the Club they discovered the safe had been emptied. Gregg estimated that £146 was missing.⁴⁰

Suspicion deepened in the days which followed, and the alleged attack was soon disproven. Gregg was immediately suspended while the club's financial records were scrutinized. Within days the disgraced secretary was forced to admit that he had been systematically stealing funds from the club. Auditors soon discovered that more than £254 were missing from the club's accounts. Gregg appeared before the committee and offered what restitution he could: the club could take the equity from his home, he said; a week later he proposed a gradual reimbursement of the funds. The club, instead, pressed charges.⁴¹

Billy Clare

Billy Clare is one of the favourite founding members of the Fremantle Workers' Club. Born in Lancashire, England, Clare migrated to Australia in 1888. He arrived in Western Australia at the beginning of the gold rushes. Taking a printing press by horse and cart from York to the goldfields he then established the prominent regional newspaper, the *Coolgardie Miner*. So began his long association with newspapers in the state: he later added the *Fremantle Advocate* and others to his business.⁴²

He was, at one point, an aspiring brewer, though his attempts in the business were a disaster. A friend quipped that his brewery was 'unique in its rapid succession of unmitigated failures'. Clare himself later admitted that his brewery was 'a small concern, but it housed a world of trouble (and broad comedy) which I relish in memory to this day'.⁴³

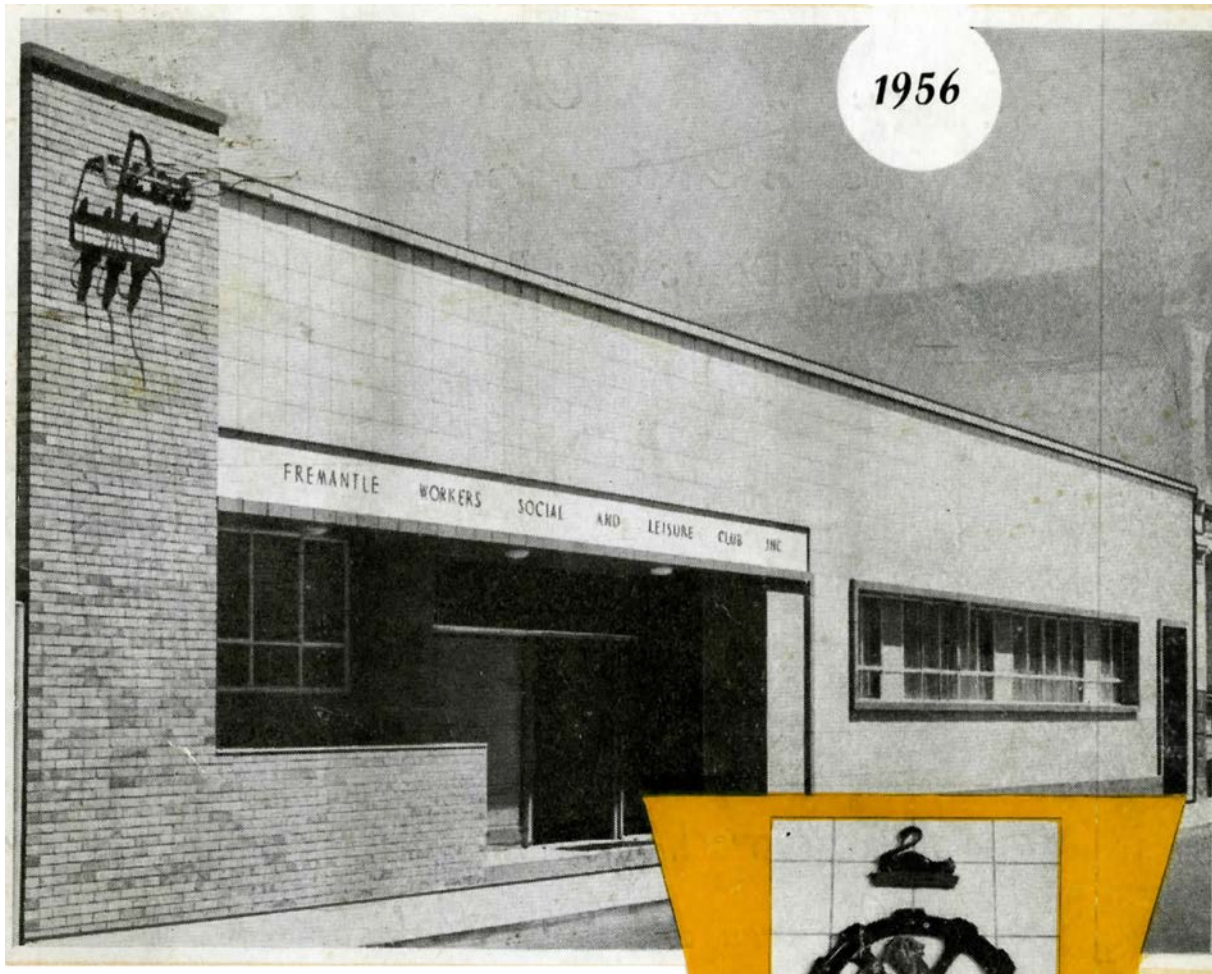
Clare's 'virile pen was always at the service of the suffering and oppressed', the *Sunday Times* later recalled. 'He was a good journalist, a fine citizen and a dear friendly soul who drew to him friends from every section of the community.'⁴⁴ It is little wonder, therefore, that Clare became an enthusiastic, founding member of the Workers' Club. He was powerfully attracted to its intention to forward the cause of democracy.

Myth surrounds the role of Clare within the Workers' Club. He has been thought for some years to have been the founding president, though we know William Roche to have had that role. It is possible that he was briefly president from 1914 to 1915, but more likely that he never held an executive position such as president or secretary. He was, however, given the role of 'grand trustee' in the 1930s. Clare was an enthusiastic supporter of the club and its mission. 'Our Club never has been and never will be, a mere drinking shop', he noted. 'It was founded on high ideals, and it has striven with greater or lesser success perhaps to live up to them...Our Club is a home'.⁴⁵

In 1929 members of the Fremantle Workers' Club recognized Clare's long years of service when they declared him to be a life member. He died in Fremantle in 1940.



WILLIAM E. CLARE, Esq.
OSW. FOUNDATION & LIFE MEMBER



↑ The new club house of the Fremantle Workers' Club was completed in 1956. It was considered a triumph of modern, post-war design.

War and Ideology

1939 - 1956

As the depression eased and the 1930s gave way to the 1940s, affluence returned to Fremantle and business increased at Henry Street. The club's financial position improved accordingly.

The onset of World War Two brought its own challenges to the club's survival. With the attack on Pearl Harbour in December 1941 and the fall of Singapore in the early days of 1942, Fremantle became a strategic hub of the Allied war effort in the Asia-Pacific. It

was here that the largest submarine base in the southern hemisphere was constructed. Thousands of Allied troops soon poured into the port.

It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the financial statement of the Fremantle Workers' Club that year showed a record profit. Yet with so many of its members having enlisted with the Australian Imperial Force during the war years, the club found it difficult to recruit bar staff and to find committee members.⁴⁶

A New Club House

Immense social change followed the war in communities across Australia. Economic restrictions of the 1940s eventually gave way to the prosperity of the 1950s. The Workers' Club thrived in the new economic and industrial environment and soon outgrew its home. After years of discussion and planning, an old building was purchased in Henry Street two doors south of the original club house. The property was demolished and replaced with the purpose-built club house that stands today.

The first committee meeting in the new building was on Sunday 11 March 1956 and the



← The Fremantle Workers' Club Executive Committee, 1955-56. FWC.

building was officially opened on 4 April. Members were extremely proud of their new home and produced a booklet to commemorate this landmark in the club's history.

But in an act that was appallingly devoid of foresight, the nineteenth century building which had been the club's original home was demolished by the association to make way for a 40-vehicle car park. It was eventually sold to the University of Notre Dame Australia in 2004.⁴⁷ In another controversial move, poker machines were introduced at the club, an attempt by the committee to help pay off its construction costs. It was the only club in Fremantle to do so. But these were temporary. Bert Hawke's Labor government in Western Australia soon eliminated poker machines across the state.⁴⁸

The club remained a popular institution in the 1950s. Its new facilities helped attract members, as did its cheap beer. Des O'Brien later recalled that the Workers' Club was a 'Mecca' in Fremantle because its beer was cheaper than at nearby hotels. But the community it offered was just as important. Many wharf workers considered it to be a 'second home'.⁴⁹ Arthur Barfield was there every evening after work and always on weekends. It was the busiest club in Fremantle, he remembered, with a long waiting list for membership:

I've had a lot of satisfaction out of the club. That was my drinking water hole, as a matter of fact. If you wanted to find me then, or anyone thirsty, we'd always be down at the Workers' Even when I was married. It never caused trouble. It was a known thing that I went to the Workers' Club on a Sunday.⁵⁰

Communism and the Paddy Troy Incident

The social fabric of Australian post-war communities was challenged by ideological discord, radical changes to migration and the deepening Cold War. Communism at home and abroad was considered by many in the 1950s to be the gravest threat to national security. Tensions between Communists and organised labour in Fremantle had been apparent since at least the 1930s, where Communists were regarded suspiciously by waterfront unions.⁵¹

Cold War politics descended on the Workers' Club in 1956 when Fremantle's leading communist, Paddy Troy, applied for membership. Troy was an ardent unionist and seasoned campaigner for improved working conditions of Maritime Union workers. In

↑ The ongoing legacy of Paddy Troy in Fremantle, and his connection to waterfront labour activism, is still as apparent.
Maritime Workers Union.

1955 he helped establish the state branch of the Federated Miscellaneous Workers Union and, in 1963, the newly established Western Australian Trades and Labor Council.⁵² Yet his application for membership of the Workers' Club was immediately controversial.

The committee's own minutes—perhaps deliberately—are silent on the debate regarding Troy's nomination. The outcome, however, was duly noted: 'his application had been rejected by the committee in what [is] believed to be the best interests of the club'.⁵³ The implication was clear. Though the Workers' Club was formed with the intent to debate democracy and politics, the risk of adding strident Communists to the club house in a period of intense Cold War rhetoric was not to be tolerated.

Not everyone was happy with the outcome. Many argued that members should be admitted to the club regardless of personal political

beliefs. It was years before their influence was sufficient to right the wrong, however. Troy died in 1978. In 1986 the club apologised to his son, John, for not admitting Troy to membership. John Troy, himself then a Labor politician, was, invited to join.⁵⁴



↑ Not permitted as members, nor even as visitors, ladies were given a sneak-preview of the new Fremantle Workers' Club building before it opened its doors in 1956.
FWC.

Women and the Club

1956 – 1985

One of the first decisions reached when the doors of the new club house opened in 1956 was regarding who belonged to the club—and who didn't. As in the past, members were reminded of the strict guidelines which governed acceptable behaviour. Rules about visitors to the club were reviewed and strengthened. While the club remained an association for working people and retained some of its original values—including pride in its library collection—members were increasingly drawn from a diverse range of professional backgrounds.

Regarding one issue, however, there was no doubt: women were to be excluded from the new club house. Even before its doors were opened, the executive committee confirmed its intention to prohibit women (other than bar staff) from entering any part of the club except the office and library.

A small concession was made. More than 400 women 'of all shapes, sizes and ages' inspected the premises in the weeks before they were opened. It was intended to provide ladies with an opportunity to 'inspect the place where so much of their husbands' leisure time is spent'. Kitchens were examined, facilities admired and refreshments were served. 'Some of the ladies even drank beer', admitted the club in mock astonishment. 'Maybe we'll invite them again soon.'⁵⁵

But they weren't. Grudging changes were only slowly implemented to enable women to take a more active role in the association.

Despite restrictions on membership, women had, nonetheless, been actively involved in the club for some decades. A Fremantle Workers' Club Ladies Committee had been established in 1933, whose role was to purchase toys for the annual club Christmas party.⁵⁶ The ladies were reported to have made an outing of this task by taking a train to Perth where they spent their allowance. Other social events in the 1930s took place where ladies were invited as guests. By the 1940s the club held regular dances at which women, for obvious reasons, were invited to attend.⁵⁷

Ladies nights were reintroduced in 1958, as Geraldine Massi recalls, which the committee was surprised to discover were successful. More such events were planned: ladies nights were thereafter convened every 8 weeks, extended licenses were acquired. The events were so successful that more than 200 chairs were borrowed to make room for their visit.⁵⁸ In January 1959 visiting rights were introduced, though ladies who visited the club were prohibited from entering the bar, had to be accompanied by men and were required to remain in the visitor's lounge at all times. Fran Herold remembers that, even in the 1960s, ladies were required to sit in a segregated space where they were served alcohol through a hatch at the end of the bar.⁵⁹

Women were admitted as 'lady members' in the early 1970s.⁶⁰ The opportunity for membership, though compromised, was popular and records show that 112 of the club's 370 members were women by 1974.⁶¹ The transition of women into membership did not always go smoothly, however, and many struggled with sexist behaviour which sometimes persisted at the club. In April 1974 a member was expelled, having been found to have behaved offensively to women in the club and to have molested one of the female bar staff. He wasn't the only member accused of offensive behaviour to women at the time.⁶²

Women found it difficult to find acceptance in the earliest years of their membership. Even the ladies competitive darts team was told they had to *earn* the right to wear club uniforms: in 1975 they were promised team t-shirts if they made it to the competition final to be broadcast on colour television. When the team did so, the executive was forced to find an affordable provider of screen printed shirts.⁶³

Full equality in membership was not achieved until 1985 when the newly passed *Sex Discrimination Act* compelled the club to formally remove all references to gender in its membership rules.⁶⁴ Today the club's membership is more evenly divided by gender: 296 of the 826 members are women.⁶⁵



↑ The Fremantle Workers' Club Ladies Darts Team, the 'Red Darts', pictured at the club in the 1970s. Back row from left to right: Kaye Miller, Glad Liddington, Marie Oliffe, Fran Davies, Sally Coleman; Front row: Judy Sinclair, Maimie Johnson, Noel Whologan. Courtesy of [TBC].

The Red Darts

There were many reasons for which ladies joined the Fremantle Workers' Club when membership was first made available to them. For some it was to engage in the competitive and social sporting activities the club offered. The ladies darts team, the 'Red Darts', did particularly well in the early 1970s when their participation in finals competition was broadcast on colour television.

As a keen darts player Sally Coleman joined the Fremantle Workers' Club in 1975 so that she could play competitive darts at a high level. Sally was a member of the Red Darts for fifteen years.

Between 1986 and 1990, Sally also worked in the kitchens of the club. Roast dinners were then served three times a week for \$5.

The club's camaraderie keeps her returning to the club each week, as do the music and events of a Friday evening.



↑ Members of the Maritime Union of Australia gather at the Fremantle Workers Club, 2014. FWC.

Revival and Rescue

1984 – 2014

Work practices at the Fremantle port were fundamentally changed in the closing decades of the century. As manual workers were replaced by automated machinery, and as long-term storage facilities were rendered redundant by the rise of container transport technology, the population and prosperity of the town declined. Fremantle's west end, in particular, began to fall into seedy disrepair.

The modern age has therefore seen the most significant challenges to the survival of the club in its hundred-year history. As the founding objects of the club faded and important staff changed, it has spent much of its recent history seeking meaning for its existence.



↑ → A Fufu Band reformed briefly in Fremantle, adopting the irrepressible style and costumes of the Workers' Club band in the 1930s.



Between 1986 and 1998 the Fremantle Workers' Club was managed by Clem Hill. It was during this time that computers were first introduced to manage stock and orders. It was also during this period that the club dispensed with many of its original objects and missions: its famous library was removed and replaced with a TAB for sports gaming. As the town around them changed, the club's purpose was not always clear. It was soon engaged in a fight for its own survival.

Despite such challenges, the club held fast in the 1980s. At its heart were two things: cheap beer and community. Fran Herold was a member of the Buffalo, Whyolla and Navy Clubs, but found a home at the Workers' where she has been attending since the 1960s. 'I really enjoyed the club,' she said, and told stories of dances, bands, committees and festival events. What is clear, however, is the powerful community she found within the walls of the club house, and which continues to bring her back regularly, though she is well into her eighties.⁶⁶

Fremantle writer, Ron Davidson, has found similarly. He tells of a visit to the clubhouse one busy lunchtime, and the discovery of community he made:

I ask my neighbour his name and whether he'd like a drink. His name is Arty and he declines the drink with grace. He hasn't had a drink since 1970. Why then does he keep coming to the heartland of Fremantle drinking? He tells me he is 86 and comes to the club whenever he feels like a chat. He chats of taking over his father's union ticket in 1957 and coming on to the wharf: lumping was a family business then unless you happened to be a footballer. He chats of 400 lumpers' bikes stacked outside the ferry terminal and not one was stolen; and how wharfies came over to the club for their schooners at lunch or smoko and of some solid drinking 'until stumps' (11pm) which destroyed Arty's liver....There were also no women and workers could wear their work hats up to the bar. Now there are women everywhere.⁶⁷

Tony Buselich became a member in the 1970s. He worked as a barman from 1987 to 2002, during which time the club's membership reached more than 2500 people. In those days the club's doors were open seven days a week until late at night. Festivals and holidays were celebrated enthusiastically. A New Year's Eve dance brought hundreds to the club house; Christmas lunch was served to members without families; drinks swilled on 1 August (the 'horses' birthday'); and the Melbourne Cup was avidly celebrated. Bands performed every Friday, Saturday and Sunday night. (Now, Buselich mourns, even Saturdays are quiet.)⁶⁸

Clem Hill was, arguably, a big part of the club's continuing success in the 1980s and 1990s. Many also praised the then treasurer, Geoff Keen.⁶⁹ The newly installed TAB, which replaced the club's famous library, brought a fresh stream of revenue and helped keep its accounts healthy. Hill and the committee worked hard to remain engaged with the club's membership, regularly running popular events and competitions and providing weekly entertainment with live bands. The club's staff increased by 50 per cent under Hill's management—climbing from 10 to 15 people.⁷⁰

Fremantle, though, was experiencing enormous demographic and industrial upheaval. Modern waterside practices, which secured the permanence of the freight container, changed employment patterns at the wharf. A university entered the town's west end. The Worker's Club sought security within its own walls. It all but ignored the massive

influx of tourists brought to Fremantle by the famous yachting event, the America's Cup, in the summer of 1986-87.⁷¹ Instead, the club preserved the 'very essence of Fremantle, the old working class town'.⁷² Its barber shop continued to operate; a Fufu Band was briefly reformed; and twice in that decade it sold more beer for the Swan Brewery than any other pub, club or tavern in the state.⁷³

A New Century

By the end of the twentieth century, however, the club's fortunes were in serious decline. The so-called 'gentrification' of Fremantle, combined with changes at the port, brought about such changes that the club's finances collapsed. Phillip Jackson, the secretary-manager who succeeded Hill, struggled to keep the club afloat in a west end that he complained was slowly 'dying'.⁷⁴ As the cost of band hire grew the club ceased hosting regular live performances.⁷⁵ Weakening trade meant that its opening hours were curtailed, increasing member discontent and adding to the club's declining profitability. By 2011 the club had just 426 members. Its management struggled with the means of survival; others speculated of financial mismanagement.⁷⁶

So dire were conditions that the doors of the Henry Street club house were closed indefinitely in May 2011. The club looked doomed to disaster.

The crisis provoked the intervention of several key supporters, including Don Whittington, a former deputy mayor of Fremantle and life member of the Fremantle Society. As the club met to consider the sale of its assets and to appoint administrators, Whittington convinced the members instead to consider alternatives. He was soon elected the club's president.⁷⁷ The club house reopened its doors in January 2012. New strategies for its survival were considered which, for a period at least, included the possibility of a merger with other clubs and which now looks certain to include a move from Henry Street.

Despite a rejuvenation in membership—there were more than 800 club members in June 2014—trading from the aging building is no longer financially sustainable. Collaboration with the South Fremantle Football Club will see the Workers' move to

Fremantle Oval by the end of 2014, their centenary year. Plans are now being considered for a joint venture proposed with the City of Fremantle, the Department of Sport and Recreation, and a number of other Fremantle recreational clubs which would see purpose-built shared facilities established at Fremantle Park.

And so the Fremantle Workers' Club has survived a century. Much has changed since 1914. Its membership remains strong, as does its relationship with organised labour—particularly the Maritime Workers' Union—though most of its members are not now port workers. Having been pulled from the brink of destitution, the club is now considering changes that will profoundly affect its style, place and future. These changes, however, are intended to preserve the element which is most valuable to the club: its community. Innovation, leadership and collaboration with others will ensure it retains the hope of a future.



↑ Clem Hill, right, was manager of the Workers' Club between 1986 and 1998.
FWC.

Our Place

Since the very beginning, the Workers' Club has provided a home and community to many of its members. Billy Clare's idea that the club is 'Our Home' has remained unchanged for people like Peter and Lyn Edmonds.

Peter Edmonds was the club manager from 1978 to 1982 while his wife, Lyn, worked in the bar. The popular Clem Hill followed, managing the association from 1986 to 1998. These were years which brought challenge and change to the club. The numbers of staff and members grew, though Fremantle was slowly transformed by industrial and demographic changes. A TAB was added to the club house, replacing its famous library.

Despite the challenges facing the modern club, the Fremantle Worker's remains an integral part of the lives of its members. To Lyn Edmonds, it is a reminder of the community which Fremantle used to be. 'It's our place, isn't it?', she concludes.⁷⁸

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